

SDMS Doc ID 2014576

# Area water cleanup gets off the ground

2014576

**S.B. COUNTY:** An expanded effort is under way to rinse pollutants out of inland resources.

BY DAVID DANELSKI AND JENNIFER BOWLES THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Water pure enough to drink spills from an iron pipe, the most visible sign of stepped-up efforts to remove groundwater pollution spreading from a Rialto-area fuel tank farm.

The fuel storage complex, a 108-acre labyrinth of tanks and interstate pipelines, is believed to have caused a broad plume of underground pollution that extends more than a mile and



Follow-up on report of fuel leaks at inland fuel tank farm

threatens drinking-water wells.

The tank farm's principal owner, Houston-based Kinder Morgan Energy Partners, has been pumping fuel-tainted water and treating it to slow the spread of MTBE, a suspected cancer-causing gasoline additive, and other pollution. The cleansed water is pumped into a ditch, where it forms a babbling brook with wildflowers growing alongside.

Another pumping operation at

the tank farm is recovering as much as 250 gallons a week of gasoline, diesel and other fuels from subterranean pools as thick as 4 feet that float on the groundwater.

A little more than a year ago, several elected officials, including U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, called for a stepped-up investigation and cleanup after The Press-Enterprise reported that the tank farm had polluted groundwater for decades and that MTBE was moving toward drinking-water wells.

Since then, 52 test wells have been drilled and more are planned to learn how far the pollution has spread and how potent it is, state water officials

said. The cleanup this year has focused on pumping and treating the groundwater as well as the removal of undiluted fuel that has pooled on top of groundwater. Last year, cleanup was limited mostly to vacuuming fuel fumes from the soil.

Government representatives and tank farm officials say they are pleased with the cleanup's progress. But much more work needs to be done.

Removing pollution that has leaked from the tank farm for as long as 25 years could take a decade, said Ken Williams, who supervises the cleanup for the state's Santa Ana Regional

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## POLLUTION

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Water Quality Control Board.

### Wells in jeopardy

It's not clear whether the pollution will reach two drinking water wells about a mile from the tank farm. Contamination has been found within 1,000 feet of the West San Bernardino County Water District wells.

"It's too early to say that," said Rose Scott, a geologist and investigator for the regional water board. She said she hopes that a second water treatment system that will be built next week will help slow the pollution.

The "pump-and-treat" systems pull polluted water from the ground and run it through carbon filters that scrub out MTBE, benzene and other harmful chemicals from gasoline contamination. What bubbles out meets drinking water standards, according to the regional water board.

The pollution plume appears to be shrinking from its leading edge, said Anthony Araza, general manager of the water district. "Is it enough? I don't know." The water district serves about 60,000 people in the surrounding area.

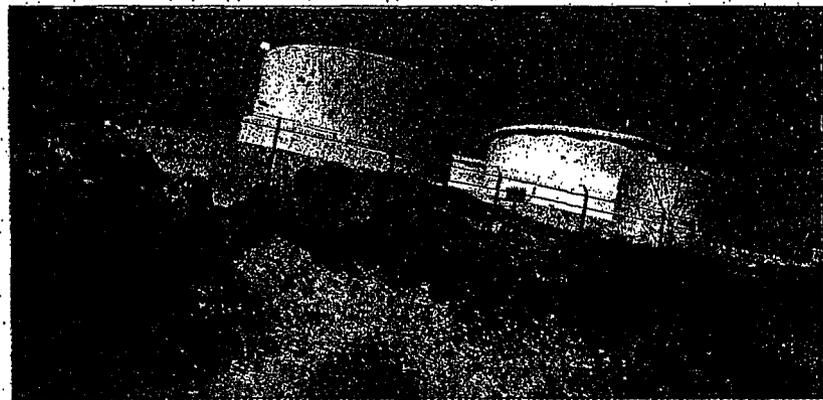
Kinder Morgan has tentatively agreed to pay Araza's agency for replacement wells if necessary.

### New concern

Araza said he's now more concerned about recent discoveries of perchlorate in the groundwater from a source or sources other than the tank farm. The chemical, used in rocket fuel, can damage the thyroid gland.

Kurt Burchtold, the water board's assistant executive officer, said that perchlorate appears to be seeping from upstream sources. Low levels of the chemical — 11 parts per billion parts of water — have been detected. The state's recommended limit for drinking water is 4 parts per billion.

The tank farm operators have agreed to test for perchlorate as they continue to investigate the



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Water is pumped from the ground and treated near Kinder Morgan Energy Partners in Colton.

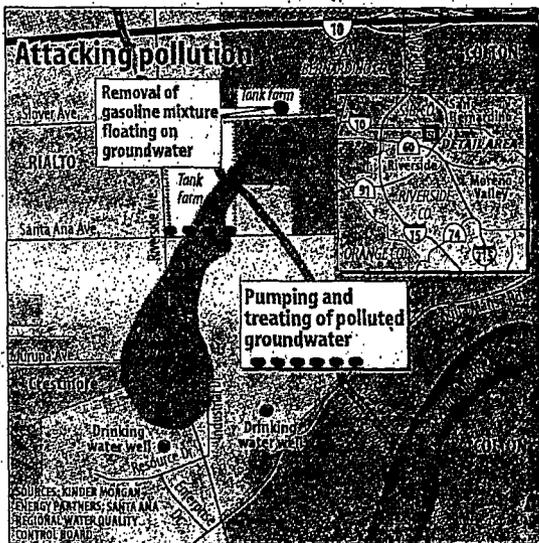
*The cleanup this year has focused on pumping and treating the groundwater as well as the removal of undiluted fuel that has pooled on top of groundwater. Last year, cleanup was limited mostly to vacuuming fuel fumes from the soil.*

extent of the pollution from gasoline and other fuels.

In addition, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has ordered them to make repairs and take measures to prevent leaks and contain spills.

Williams said he doesn't know how much the cleanup has and will cost Kinder Morgan and its petroleum company tenants. But he added that he wouldn't be surprised if it reached millions of dollars.

Kinder Morgan spokesman Larry Pierce said the company is not disclosing its cleanup costs. "Everything is on plan and



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going well," Pierce said. "We will continue to work with them (the state water board and the water district) and keep making progress."

The tank farm is on the route of pipelines that ship gasoline and other fuel products as far as Las Vegas and Phoenix. It has 47 above-ground storage tanks that can hold 63 million gallons of gasoline, diesel and jet fuel.

Last year, Kinder Morgan officials said that more aggressive pump-and-treat strategies were unwarranted. But Williams said the company agreed to do them after test well results showed more contamination than was previously believed to be present.

The tank farm sits on an underground water basin that straddles Riverside and San Bernardino counties and is a key source of inland drinking water supplies. It is replenished by rain and melted snow.